57 200 Arch St.

No. 13

Read March 15th. 1825

Remarks
on
the Epidemic
as it occured
in Chambersburg.
By
George A. Abetich
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Pennsylvania

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A few sporadic cases of intermittent fever existed in the months of June and July, during which time the atmosphere was variable. Cold rains of two and sometimes three days continuance, were succeeded by as many of excessively warm and dry weather. Alternations of this kind were kept up almost constantly from the 12th of June until the last of July, when the weather became more uniform.

The above cases were exclusively confined to the most elevated situations within the town, and were most probably excited by the vicissitudes of weather.

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With August the weather set in very warm, and continued so until the 7th of September; being, however occasionally interrupted by a slight shower of rain.
On the seventh of September the atmosphere became foggy, which, with frequent rains, continued until the 18th.
From the drought experienced in August, the water within the banks of the Canacochegue, which has its course through Chambersburg, was greatly exhausted; so much so, as to leave exposed in many places its bed, which was thickly covered with mosses.
By the exposure of these places to the action of the sun, for several successive days together, there was evolved the miasmata, which obviously gave rise to the disease, which forms the subject of this essay.

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This disease assumed the character of intermittents and remittents, in about the proportion of four of the former to one of the latter.

It originated about the beginning of August in the miasmatic districts, within the immediate vicinity of the Canacocheague and in those places where its bed was first exposed; thence rapidly extending until the middle of the month, when it might be said to have been pretty general.

Few families escaped the disease, which attacked equally all classes of society. Indeed whole families, some of which consisted of as many as ten persons, were attacked without the exception of a single member.

On the first approach of the intermittent form of the disease, which

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which assumed the tertian or quotidian type, the patient, as is usual, complained of debility accompanied with violent head ach, loss of appetite, and disordered stomach.

By the last symptom vomiting was often spontaneously excited, soon after which there was a manifest abatement of all the preceding symptoms.
Many of those, who experienced so much relief from spontaneous vomiting and who had previously called in medical aid, now refused to receive any attendance, being under the impression that their disease was entirely eradicated.
This calm, however, was of short duration. The lapse of time in no one instance, which came within my observation, amounted to more than 48 hours, which was the most common

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common reason for the accession of the paroxysm, when those who had but one, refused, now earnestly desired relief.
Those cases in which nausea did not induce vomiting were more violent; for after this last symptom, the patient next complained of a cold, creeping sensation, first between his shoulders, thence extending over his whole body, and which in many instances amounted to a complete shivering. This, which is called the cold stage of a paroxysm of intermittent fever, generally, lasted from one to two hours.
In this stage the pulse was small, irregular, and frequent. The distress of stomach and headach much increased. The face pale, the skin having the appearance of tightly binding the whole frame. The lips and nails of a quite bluish cast. This stage, as I have observed,

disease, continuing from one to two hours, gradually subsided, and gave room for the hot.

In this stage the pulse was full, hard and more regular. The headach was still more increased but the distress of stomach somewhat abated.

The face was flushed, and the skin relaxed. The lips and nails resumed their natural colour.

In persons of a plethoric habit there was much confusion of ideas which frequently arose to delirium. This stage continuing generally from two to three hours, gradually gave way to the sweating stage, which was ushered in by copious perspiration.

When the sweat had flowed for some time, these symptoms all subsided; leaving the patients well enough

enough to resume their occupations until interrupted by another paroxysm, the symptoms of which were a complete repetition of those already described.

Seeing that the disease was seated in the stomach, which was evinced by the relief obtained from spontaneous vomiting, the first indication looked upon was that of cleansing thoroughly this organ; and for this purpose the Emetic Tartar was selected and given in the ordinary way, until vomiting was duly excited. When this end was attained, large draughts of tepid water or weak tea were swallowed, by which the operation of the medicine was much assisted.

The matter thrown up was for the most part of a slimy consistence, and evidently

evidently discoloured with bile.

An emetic taken ~~shortly~~ shortly before an expected paroxysm sometimes entirely prevented its recurrence, and always rendered it much lighter.

To cleanse more thoroughly the Alimentary canal, and fully to prepare the system for the bark, a purgative was next administered which was found absolutely necessary before the bark could be retained with any degree of certainty. For this purpose ten grs of Calomel with twenty of Jalap or what answered equally well, the same quantity of Pod: Peltatum were given to an adult. This seldom failed to evacuate the bowels sufficiently. Though cases did occur when from extreme torpor of the Alimentary canal a

a repetition of this dose followed by an ounce of Sulph: Magnesia was not more than adequate to this end.

These means were employed in the intermission as well as the bark which was next given in doses of ℥ij every two hours this being generally as much as the stomach would retain.

When from irritability of stomach the bark was rejected, the addition of ℥j of Carbon: Potapa to ℥j of bark generally obviated that effect.

When the bark had the effect of inducing costiveness there were added to the same preparation ℥ij of the Bitart: Potapa and when it had the contrary effect a few drops of Tinct: Opii were given with each dose.

Previous however to the exhibition of emetics to those of a full habit of body

body there were taken from the arm 12 or 16 ounces of blood.

Arsenic though not through choice was given to some of the lower class of society, who were entirely opposed to taking the bark from its producing as they said, "pains in the bones that stick them round" It was administered in the form of a saturated solution in doses of 10 drops three times a day.

This medicine although it checked a majority of the cases in which it was prescribed, proved to be decidedly inferior to the bark.

The treatment of children consisted in vomiting with Ipecacuanha, purging with Calc: & Rhei and substituting for the bark the Arsenical Solution, which was thought better adapted to their cases, being at the same time more conveniently taken

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When the Arsenical Solut. failed to put an end to the disease a decoction of bark was given which promptly checked it.

Comparatively few cases resisted this plan of treatment when strictly adhered to.

However when these means failed to prevent a recurrence of the paroxysm a pill containing two grs. of opium and one of Ipecacuanha was given to an adult on the approach of the cold stage, which evidently shortened its duration and did not perceptibly increase the hot stage which was at first anticipated.
During the hot stage a powder containing ten grs. of Nit. Potassa and one sixth of a grain of Emetic Tartar was given every two hours by which its duration was

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was also shortened.
During the intermission the bark being resumed and continued for a few days never failed to check the disease.

The remittent form of the disease at its onset was marked by the same symptoms as that of the intermittent. viz. debility. headach. loss of appetite. and nausea of stomach. When these had continued for a day or two the patient experienced a coldness of his whole frame particularly of his extremities. This lasted generally not more than an hours after which the previous symptoms were greatly aggravated. vomiting soon took place which in many instances was truly bilious. but after continuing for some days it became bloody.
This was the course the disease pursued

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pursued when left to nature, since it not unfrequently happened that it had arrived to this pitch before medical aid was applied for.

Call'd on at this stage of the disease the pulse was found for the most part full, hard, and frequent. Blood was first taken from the arm to the extent of sixteen ounces next to this. Anticmetics were given to calm irritability of stomach. Those which were found most efficacious were either old pills of opium given at intervals of one hour, or equal portions of lime water and sweet milk of which a table spoonful was given and frequently repeated, or of the Rp below a tea spoonful was taken after every effort to vomit. Rp Carbon Potassæ — ℥j

Tinct Opii ℥j

Ess Menth Pipe ℥j

Aqua Font. ℥j

When one of these failed another was tried, and generally with the happiest effect. When all these remedies failed to check the vomiting which was very seldom the case, a sinapism applied on the Epi=gastric region was invariably found successful.

The irritability of stomach being now allayed, and fearful that Emetics although still indicated might induce a fatal Hæmatemesis, ten grains of Calomel with pilules of Jalap were next given and frequently, without any effect whatever.

Extreme torpor of the bowels rendered it necessary to repeat this dose every two hours.

In as many as five or six cases all of which were females I witnessed this dose given and repeated three

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three times before the slightest purgative effect was experienced.

A sudorific powder was now given & repeated every two hours until a remission took place, when a preparation of Bark the same as that used in the intermittent form of the disease was given every ~~two hours~~ hour in as large doses as the stomach would retain.

This plan of treatment being rigorously persevered in, very few cases were protracted beyond the third remission. The disease being ~~early~~ attacked early in its commencement, and before it had advanced to the stage first described was much less troublesome and uniformly gave way to the following remedies. Venesection when indicated by the pulse or a fulness and throbbing of the temporal arteries,

arteries accompanied with violent pain in the head.

This was succeeded by an Emetic and cathartic, the last of which as already observed was repeated as often as two and three times before purging was excited. Sudorifics while the fever continued and a combination of Bark and Virginia Snake Root during the remission. These comprised the whole of the remedies that were found necessary to effect a speedy cure, and not in a solitary instance did I know the disease to resist this mode of treatment.

This disease was not confined to Chambersburg alone, but was so far as could be ascertained, diffused throughout Franklin County of which it is the Capital.

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To quote the authority of some of the oldest and most respectable inhabitants of Chambersburg, it prevailed to a greater extent than it ever has within their recollection; even more so than in 1804, and the number of deaths also exceeded those of that time. That the disease was fatal in very many instances is unquestionably true, but it is equally true that it did not prove so in consequence of any incurable nature in it.

It is believed that all the deaths that occurred during the prevalence of the disease, took place in consequence of their being either entirely entrusted to nature, or not interfered with until they had run into a comatose state from which it was sometimes impossible to arouse the patients.

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